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BORN TO SERVE

By CHARLES M. SHELDON,

Author of "IN HIS STEPS," "JOHN KING'S QUESTION CLASS," "EDWARD BLAKE," Etc.

Barbara had been unusually confined to the housework. Mrs. Ward had been nervous subject to an attack of nervous headache, and the whole of the care had been thrown upon Barbara. Mrs. Ward had now learned to trust her implicitly. This did not mean that the sharpness of her manner under stress of her headaches had entirely disappeared, but Barbara had learned almost perfectly how to anticipate her wishes, and the girl's great love for Carl and his complete trust in her, together with Barbara's cheerful, competent handling of the entire kitchen, had all united to capture Mrs. Ward's affections. She was content, even in her enforced idleness, to lie still with her pain and indulge in a great feeling of thankfulness for such a treasure in the house.

She was talking of it one evening with her husband.

"Why, you realize, Richard, what a prize we have in Barbara?"

"She is certainly a most remarkable girl. The most competent servant we ever had in the house, isn't she?"

"Without any comparison. And I want you to build that room as soon as you can."

Mrs. Ward had mentioned the matter of the room over the kitchen, and he had agreed that it was not suitable for a girl like Barbara.

"Or any other girl, Richard," Mrs. Ward had said.

"Yes, I'll have a carpenter come right up and look over the house. We shall have to raise the roof over the kitchen."

"Why can't we at the same time enlarge the kitchen so that Barbara can have a corner of that carpeted off for her own when she does not want to run upstairs? I saw Mrs. Rice's kitchen the other day. It is unusually large."

One end of it is neatly fitted up with a table for books or sewing material, several comfortable chairs, and pictures on the walls—a very cozy, comfortable corner, where her girl can read for company or sit down to read or rest."

"But Barbara never has any company, does she?" Mr. Ward asked, with a little amusement at the look his wife gave him. "She hasn't any beaux, as all our other girls have had."

"No," Mrs. Ward answered, thoughtfully. "But—"

"Well, what?"

"If she had, we would ask her to invite them into the parlor. Of course, we can't expect a girl as attractive as Barbara is to go through life without attracting some one."

"Unless her place as a servant—"

began Mr. Ward.

"But why should that make any difference?" Mrs. Ward asked, irritated by the suggestion. "I don't see why you should be so afraid of the parlor."

"I haven't asked many," Carl pointed, but he went back to his game on the floor, wondering in his childhood mind what made the usually gentle Barbara so cross.

"I think the Brays can take him in. I hope they can. It's so near by that I can have him with us often. We'll be right on his way to church and back," Mr. Ward remarked as he settled himself to the reading of the evening paper.

While her room was in process of reconstruction, Barbara had been going home to stay with her mother. Mrs. Clark was only partly reconciled to Barbara's choice of a career, and when, late particular night, after the news of Mr. Morton's coming, Barbara arrived quite early (having excused herself soon on the plea of being very tired), Mrs. Clark noted the signs of trouble in Barbara's face, and instantly questioned her about it.

"Your work is too hard, too confining, my dear. It is not at all the work for such a girl as you are, Barbara. It will kill you."

"No, mother, I don't think it will," Barbara replied, bravely.

"But I don't see what good it is doing to anyone. You are just wasting yourself to death like any ordinary servant. Your talents as a teacher are wasted. Your social position is gone. You have buried yourself in a kitchen. Of what use is it? You might be in the world like other people, with some opportunities to rise and make the most of yourself, whereas now you are shut out from all the ordinary social ambitions and accomplishments of other girls."

"Mother, don't please," cried Barbara, and then to her mother's surprise she suddenly broke down and began to cry softly.

"There! I told you so! You are all worn out," said her mother, coming to her and putting a loving arm about her.

"No, mother, I am not very tired in body. I'm just a little bit discouraged tonight," Barbara declared, and after a few minutes' crying, with her head in her mother's lap, she began to talk cheerfully of her plans. She was going to see Mrs. Vane again. She thought she could in a little time get Hilda interested and add one or two more to the inner circle. They were very kind to her at the Ward's. It was very much like home there. They were making a new room for her, and enlarging her kitchen. Barbara spoke of this last with a playful reference to a laughing remark Mrs. Ward had made while talking of the enlargement of the kitchen: "You can see apart this new corner for company, unless you will use the parlor when your beaux come to call." "I don't think I shall ever need it, mother, you are all the beaux I want," added

"Oh dear!" Barbara sighed, as she went the rounds of her daily task, carrying this added burden of knowledge. "Is there no family without its skeleton? Ought I to drag it out for their inspection, if they don't know of its existence? It hardly seems to be my business. And they must be blind not to have noticed as much as has been apparent even to a servant."

It was a week after Alfred's departure that Mr. Ward announced the news of Mr. Morton's acceptance of his call to Marble Square church. It was in the evening after the supper work was all done, and Barbara, as her custom had been for several days during the remodeling of her room, was seated with the family in the dining-room, which was also the favorite living-room, helping Mrs. Ward on some sewing. Lewis and George were reading, and Carl was playing on the floor near Barbara.

"I have Morton's letter of acceptance, Martha. As chairman of the supply committee it came to me today. It is a good thing for Marble Square church. The people had sense enough to call him without going through a long course of candidature."

"When is he coming?" Mrs. Ward asked.

"Two weeks from next Sunday. The church at Carlton released him under special conditions, because they could get a man at once to fill his place. We're fortunate to get a man like Morton. He has a future."

"Barbara made me a gingerbread man once, and we called it Mr. Morton, didn't we, Barbara?" Carl spoke up suddenly, after an absorbed silence during which he was apparently not listening to a syllable that was being said.

"Where is Mr. Morton going to stay?" Mrs. Ward asked.

"I don't know yet. I wrote him that we would be delighted to take him in here, but we didn't have the room."

"And I told Barbara," Carl broke in as if nothing had been said since he spoke last, "that I thought the gingerbread man looked just like Mr. Morton, and she said she thought it didn't. I wish Mr. Morton would come here to live, don't you, Barbara? Wouldn't that be fine?"

Barbara did not answer, and Carl got up off the floor, and went over to her and pulled her work out of her hands.

"Carl! Carl! You mustn't do that," Mrs. Clark exclaimed.

"Say, Barbara, mother's right," Carl persisted.

"Don't ask so many questions," replied Barbara, almost sharply.

"I haven't asked many," Carl pointed, but he went back to his game on the floor, wondering in his childhood mind what made the usually gentle Barbara so cross.

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Barbara, playfully.

Her mother shook her head. "What company can you ever have, Barbara? You have forfeited all expectation of it by putting yourself into your present position. You are so situated that neither your inferiors nor your equals can meet with you socially. There is an impassable gulf between you and the young people of your own degree of education and refinement."

"Not necessarily, mother," Barbara stoutly protested. Perhaps a little unconsciously she was trying to give herself some hope. "Anyone for whom I might care as a friend in the social world would not be influenced by my position."

"They couldn't help it, much as they might not wish to," Mrs. Ward is powerful.

"I don't care for society!" exclaimed Barbara. "That is, for society represented by wealth and fashion. But I don't believe any real Christian will ever make any great or false distinction between different kinds of labor."

"It isn't that altogether," Mrs. Clark wearily said, as if tired to continue. "It's a difference in social instincts and social feelings that separates people. You will find it out from experience in time, I am afraid."

When Barbara went back to her work the next morning, it was with a resolution to do something that perhaps the talk with her mother had suggested. In the afternoon she asked Mrs. Ward for leave to go and see Mrs. Vane, and it was readily granted.

When she knocked at the door and Mrs. Vane heartily bade her enter, she was more excited than she had been in a long time.

"I want you to help me make a test, Mrs. Vane," Barbara said, as the old lady sat erect, confronting her and looking straight at her with those terrible eyes. Barbara, however, did not fear them. She understood the character of Mrs. Vane thoroughly.

"Tell me all about it, dear," said Mrs. Vane.

Barbara went on, calming her excitement, but not her interest. When she was through Mrs. Vane said: "I am perfectly willing, my dear. But I think I know how it will come out, beforehand."

"But I want to prove it for myself."

"Very well," Mrs. Vane replied, with the nearest approach to a sigh that Barbara had ever heard her utter, and Barbara finally departed to her work. If she had realized what results would follow the test Mrs. Vane was going to make for her, she could not have walked back so calmly.

CHAPTER V. A TRUE SERVANT OF THE LORD.

The "test" that Barbara had proposed to Mrs. Vane was not anything very remarkable, either as a test or as an experiment. Mrs. Vane was to invite several people to her house some evening and invite Barbara with the rest, presenting her in every way like all the others. The curiosity that Barbara felt was in reality something in the nature of a protest against a remark made by her mother that society would not accept, under any conditions, a servant into its circle, and that not even Mrs. Vane with all her wealth and eccentricity and social standing could really do anything to remove the barrier that other people would at once throw up against her.

No sooner had Barbara perceived that Mrs. Vane was perfectly willing to do what she asked, and indeed looked forward to it with a kind of peculiar zest, than she began to regret having asked her. Nothing would give her a more lively sense of the error she had committed than to see Mrs. Vane, as she pondered over it. What if she should be welcomed for herself? That would prove nothing and help nothing. She would go to Mrs. Vane next day, and ask her to forgive a foolish impulse that had no good reason for existing; and that would be the end of it.

But before she had found an afternoon to go and see Mrs. Vane that energetic lady had invited her company, and it was too late, Barbara said to herself that she would refuse her own invitation and not go, but Mrs. Vane next day wrote a characteristic note urging Barbara not to disappoint her.

"You must not hesitate to come for fear of putting me in any awkward position, my dear. I am independent of any one thing you can do. For I have found that you are a member of my own family, and you may be surprised to find that I have found you a much better life than yours that there is still a good deal of human kindness left in the world. In the whole, however, you will be deemed to meet with what you undoubtedly expect. I shall not be surprised if you have all your family connections and have all your position counted greatest in the kingdom of men. The time will come when the first shall be last and the last first, when that time comes, servant girls will be as good as Duke's daughters and sit at the same banquet. You are not willing to wait until then, so come to my front and prepare to be overlooked. But don't stay away for fear of hurting me. The only way you can hurt me is by not coming. I don't mind that from my enemies. They don't know any better. But my friends ought to. Yours truly, MRS. VANE."

This letter put Barbara more or less at her ease; and, when the night of the gathering came, she went to it quite self-possessed and prepared for anything. The reality of it she was not prepared for in the least, and among all her experiences she counted this the most remarkable.

It was to be rather a large gathering, and when Barbara arrived the front rooms were quite well filled. Mrs. Vane introduced her to three or four ladies standing in the front hall, and it was a young woman whom Barbara's eyes, gleefully assessed and very distinguished looking, even to Barbara. Her name was Miss Dillingham.

"My mother was a Dillingham," said Barbara, simply, as an opening remark for conversation.

"Indeed, your name is—"

"A Christian gentleman," replied Barbara in a low tone, "would not make any distinction between a servant girl and a school-teacher."

Mrs. Clark sighed. "It is useless for me to argue with you, Barbara. You will probably learn all the bitterness of your position by painful facts. All the theories of social equality are beautiful, but very few of them amount to anything in the real world of society."

"I don't care for society!" exclaimed Barbara. "That is, for society represented by wealth and fashion. But I don't believe any real Christian will ever make any great or false distinction between different kinds of labor."

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of the Dillinghams, may I ask? The Vermont Dillinghams?"

"Yes, Mother's father was from Washington county."

"How interesting!" The young woman smiled in a very interesting manner at Barbara. "Then we must be related somewhere. Our family is from the same county. Is your father living here in Crawford?"

"Father died last year," said Barbara, returning the young woman's look of interest.

"It's rather strange I have not met you before," said Miss Dillingham. "You have been shut in on account of your father's death." She looked at Barbara's simple black silk dress, which was Barbara's one party dress, very plain, but in perfect taste in every way. "But I thought I knew all the Dillinghams of the Vermont branch. Mother will want to meet you."

"Is she here to-night?" asked Barbara.

"Yes, she's in the other room somewhere. Ah! There's the new minister of Marble Square church, Mr. Morton!" Miss Dillingham exclaimed. "I didn't know that he had come yet. I think he is perfectly splendid. Have you ever heard him preach?"

"Yes, I heard him once," replied Barbara; and the next moment Mr. Morton had caught sight of them, and came out into the hall and greeted them.

"Good evening, Miss Clark. I'm very glad to meet you again. And you, Miss Dillingham," he said in his simple but hearty manner.

"You are good at remembering names," said Barbara, because she could not think of anything brilliant to say. "I've understood that one of the difficulties for ministers is the task of remembering so many people."

"Yes, I've heard Uncle James say," spoke up Miss Dillingham, brightly. "Uncle James is rector of St. Mary's in Crawford," she nodded by way of explanation to Barbara. "I've heard him say that he could remember names that began with certain letters, but that he was completely forgetful of others. It must be very nice to have a distinguished memory for people's names. It is such a pleasing flattery to the people who are addressed. Every one likes to be remembered. He takes it as a special compliment."

"I don't know that I can claim any special faculty in that direction," the young minister replied, smiling. "Your names come near the beginning of the alphabet, and I perhaps that helps me. The farther one gets into the alphabet, the more intricate and difficult the matter becomes."

"It's a very disappointing explanation, Mr. Morton," said Miss Dillingham, laughing. "We hoped, at least I did, that it was something personal about ourselves that made you remember us."

"What, for example?" said Morton, gravely.

"For example, our—our looks, or—?" Miss Dillingham turned to Barbara. "What should you say, Miss Clara?"

"Or our occupations," suggested Barbara, coloring a little.

"But we've no occupations," said Miss Dillingham, carelessly. "At least, I haven't any since finishing at Vassar. Mother wants me to study photography. What would you say, Mr. Morton?"

"I'm the young man seemed unprepared for an answer. 'Oh, I should say you would take a very good picture.'"

"Now, that's certainly a compliment, isn't it, Miss Clark?" she exclaimed, laughing again. "And yet they told me you couldn't talk small talk, Mr. Morton."

"I was trying to relieve my blunder about the memory of the names," said Mr. Morton, laughing with them. "But, if you really want me to try, about the photography, I think it would be a good thing for you to learn it. I believe everyone ought to have an occupation of some kind."

"Even society young women?"

"Yes, even they," Morton answered, with his characteristic gravity, which, however, was not at all gloomy or morose. Young women like Miss Dillingham, he said, and spoke of it as fascinating. The reason it was fascinating was that it revealed a genuine seriousness in life. Not morbid, but interesting.

"What would you have us do, then? What can society girls like Miss Clark and myself do?"

Miss Dillingham asked the question seriously, or thought she did.